

9-1523

10 MAR 1957

The Honorable Sinclair Weeks
Secretary of Commerce
Washington, D. C.

Dear Sinclair:

As I promised you in my letter of 1 March, we have reviewed Mr. Blaikie's stimulating report of his trip through the Soviet Union, and I am enclosing the comments of my staff.

I was particularly interested to read Mr. Blaikie's hand-written comments on the cover as well as certain of his general conclusions regarding the impact of education on the evolution of the Soviet system. As you may know, I have said on several occasions that one of the fatal errors of the Soviet leaders was the mistaken belief that they could introduce mass education and still close off their people from access to the realities of the outside world.

My thanks again for the opportunity to read this report. If appropriate, I hope you will convey my appreciation to Mr. Blaikie.

Sincerely,

SIGNED

Allen W. Dulles
Director

Enclosure:

Comments on Report, and the report itself

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STAT

(12 March 1957)

COMMENTS ON MR. RALPH BLAIR'S REPORT,
"MY TRIP THROUGH RUSSIA"

1. Most visitors would certainly agree with the author's description of the average Soviet "man on the street" as peace-loving, friendly, mild-mannered, and sincere. Moreover, most observers would agree with Mr. Blair that the average Soviet citizen's way of life leaves much to be desired. Mr. Blair was particularly struck with the low quality of consumer goods, the high prices, and, generally speaking, the relatively low standard of living. These, of course, are things which cannot be hidden even on a guided tour, and, compared to U.S. standards, are bound to impress visitors unfavorably.
2. Mr. Blair has also rightly stressed the emphasis on education as a source of potential conflict in the Soviet system. It is indeed interesting to see what social, political, and economic pressures are exerted as Soviet schools send out an ever-increasing number of graduates. It should be recognized that academic inquiry is not free in the Soviet Union and that the basic political and economic system is not generally subject to debate. However, some students who, along with the rest of the population, have been subjected to rigid interpretation of social, economic, and political phenomena have now dared to question the Party line, and even the right of the Party to lay down the line. This in itself is indicative of a new spirit which has already become a problem for the regime. The solution to this problem will be most difficult and will preoccupy the post-Stalin regime for the foreseeable future.
3. In view of the continuing rapid progress of industrial production in the Soviet Union, it is, at least, misleading to state that "Russia is floundering in production," that "with the possible exception of military equipment, everything they produce is miserably poor," and that "there apparently has not been any improvement in the past few years" (page 36).
4. Despite the relatively low priority assigned to consumer goods industries by the Soviet regime, observers in Moscow have noted in recent years a definite improvement in the quality and quantity of consumer goods. It is interesting to note in view of the low priority assigned to light industry that Mr. Blair, in his visit to a textile mill, was favorably impressed with its equipment and efficiency.

5. Mr. Blaikie visited several farms and felt that on at least one farm the "working conditions and wages compared favorably with farm conditions in other countries" (page 9). It seems clear that the farms visited by Mr. Blaikie were showplaces and not representative of Soviet agriculture as a whole. If all of the farms were as completely equipped and as well managed as those which he visited, the agricultural sector of the Soviet economy would not be as great a problem for the Soviet leaders as it is today. Mr. Blaikie is also under the impression that collective farmers select their own chairmen. In actual practice, the collective farmers have little choice in this matter. In the past few years, about one-third of the collective farm chairmen have been replaced by Party officials or leaders who are more politically responsive to the wishes of the State.

6. Although it is true, as Mr. Blaikie stated, that the labor union pays a part of the expenses for workers to visit rest homes -- such as those on the Black Sea -- these visits are expensive, and the portion borne by the worker is relatively high when compared with his low wages. In addition, the number of workers admitted to such rest homes is limited and admission is a special privilege attainable by only a relatively small number of workers.

7. Mr. Blaikie has characterized Soviet society as one that "must remain classless in order to succeed" (page 35). At the present time, Soviet society is far from classless, perhaps being more highly stratified than in many Western nations.

CIA/GRR
13 March 1957

100-157

MEMORANDUM FOR: Director of Central Intelligence

THROUGH: Acting Deputy Director/Intelligence

SUBJECT: Comments on Ralph Blaikie's Report,
"My Trip Through Russia"

1. It is suggested that the enclosed letter for your signature be forwarded to Secretary Weeks. The comments of my staff on Mr. Ralph Blaikie's report of his trip through the Soviet Union are attached to the letter to Secretary Weeks.

2. You will see that our comments on Mr. Blaikie's observations are generally favorable, although certain of his broad conclusions regarding Soviet agriculture and Soviet industrial progress are clearly in error.



OTTO E. GUTHE
Assistant Director
Research and Reports

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Enclosure:
Letter to Secretary Weeks,
with enclosure.